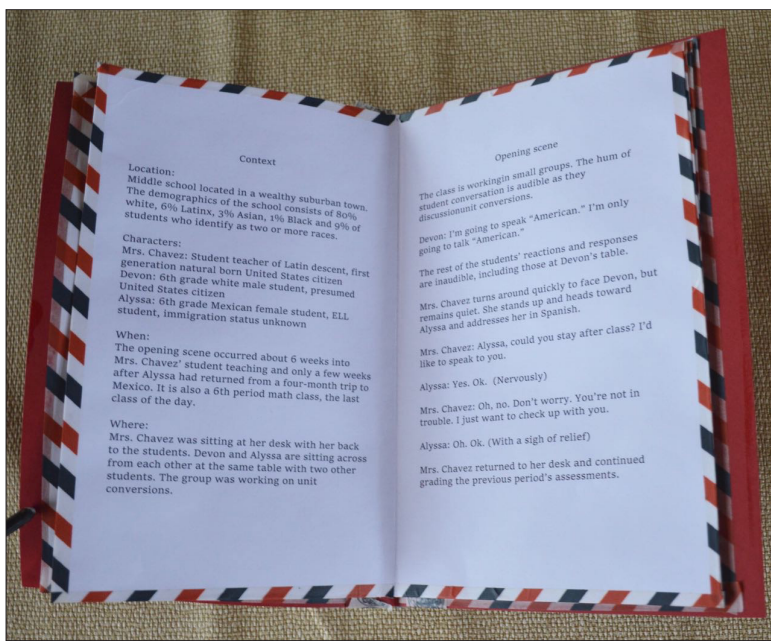


TIERRA MIA

*Playbill/Script by Ninoshka Chavez
Middle School Mathematics*



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NINOSHKA CHAVEZ ARTIST STATEMENT

The playbill/script *Tierra Mia* details a scene in which a student named Devon states that he is “only going to speak American” and dives into the conversations that could have bloomed from that interaction. The script allowed me to present the situation as it happened objectively. The playbill allows for assumptions to be made clear and visible which forced me to very intentional with my word choice. Not every reader will be on a personal journey to unlearn racism, so the authentic questions posed will spark an internal dialogue for each member of the audience. Because of my lack of interaction with Devon in response to the comment he made, readers are forced to face and interrogate my assumptions of Devon’s intent and motivations. Readers can look at the situation from three different perspectives in the form of monologues, while understanding that these stances are conjectures based on limited information of how the students and I may have felt before, during and after an incident described.

This remark forced me to engage on the following questions:

How did my response, or lack of response, to comments surrounding race effect my learning environment? How could I have used the comment “I’m only going to speak American” to initiate conversations about individual, interpersonal or systemic racism in my math classroom?

I see that my own hyphenated identity played an immense role in how I reacted to the main students involved. I was born and raised in Southern California and attended schools comprised of 80% Latinx students. In my student teaching environment, I became increasingly aware about how it felt to be one of two teachers of color on campus in a school that is 80% White. I’ve now recognize that I did not participate in a discussion with Devon because I was afraid I may be put into a position where I would have to defend how “American” I am. Not discussing the comment contradicts what Ryken (2015) would suggest is culturally responsive teaching. I realize that initiating a genuine conversation surrounding Devon’s comment and any student’s natural curiosity is appropriate in a math classroom. Should I ever be brave enough to extend these kinds of comments into a whole class discussion, students will engage in critical mathematical practices such as critiquing and debating as well as attending to precision though clarity in their reasoning and statements.

The cover of the playbill features an American flag made out of white stripe with red text. The red text provides the racial background of some notable American figures that have a hyphenated identity. These figure include civil right activists, journalists, actresses, and a music producer that have significant roles in American pop culture. And, these people advocate for minorities or present stories from a different perspective. At the end of the text, photos are used to depict everyday women of various racial backgrounds that straddle and embrace a hyphenated American identity.

Continuing with a patriotic theme, the pages are lined with red, white and blue pin stripes, which is reminiscent of vintage post cards. The detail reminds me of an era in which children grew up with pen pals from all around the world and an appreciation for different cultures could be adopted. Ironically, now that those foreign pen pals live next door the sentiment for community and understanding may not continue to bloom and is weakened by today’s administration. The title *Tierra Mia* translates to “my land” or “my earth.” As with many sayings, there are several meanings to the phrase. Many use it to talk about their country or their homeland, which for most immigrants is in the process of being redefined as they’re are making sense of their new home.

Ryken, A. E. (2015). Engaging children’s spontaneous questions about social diversity. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 17 (2), 99-105. DOI:10.1080/15210960.2015.1022450



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